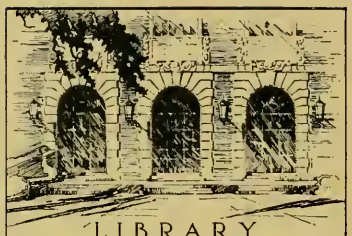

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Is Mr. Gladstone inconsistent with his former profession?

A QUESTION

RESPECTFULLY SUGGESTED TO

THE MEMBERS OF CONVOCATION.

BY

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ADVERTISEMENT.

In publishing the following remarks, the Author thinks it right to mention, that they are written without any communication with Mr. Gladstone, nor is that Gentleman to be held in any way responsible for what is here advanced. Having heard much of Mr. Gladstone's alleged inconsistency, the Author was induced to read carefully the two Pamphlets (Mr. Gladstone's, and Mr. Wordsworth's) on which that charge has been founded. The result he has attempted to exhibit in the following remarks. Whether he has correctly represented either Mr. Gladstone's present or past sentiments, he knows not. At all events, he has endeavoured to do so faithfully; and, as his only object has been to draw attention to the truth, and to prevent, if possible, disagreement when it is uncalled for, he earnestly hopes that these remarks, the object of which is peace, will be received in the spirit in which they are offered.

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The objections alleged against Mr. Gladstone by those who are now endeavouring to prevent his re-election for the University of Oxford, are mainly these:

1. That he has departed, generally, from the principles which he held in 1847.

2. In particular, that he advocates the separation of the State from the Church.

To which may be added, his votes on the admission of Jews to the Legislature, and on the Ecclesiastical Titles' Assumption Bill; which, though not alleged to be a departure on his part from any implied pledge under which he was originally elected, are now said, by his opponents, to be at variance with the sentiments of the majority of his constituents.

The first of these charges is of too vague a character to admit of any reply beyond that of a general denial, having been supported by no specific allegations beyond those contained in the other charges; while, of the latter, that of advocating the separation of Church and State, is referred to as a logical consequence from other principles he is said to have laid down, not as resting on any direct statements of his own.

The Work in which the principles referred to are said to be maintained, is a Letter addressed to the Bishop of Aberdeen, "On the Functions of Laymen in the Church;" in which Mr. Gladstone is led, in the course of his argument, to speak of Religious Freedom in terms alleged to be at variance with his former published statements, and leading, in their logical consequence, to a separation of Church and State.

It is idle to deny that, whatever may be the ostensible grounds of opposition to Mr. Gladstone, the real one is to be found in those causes, which, in the present day, divide men on religious and ecclesiastical matters, and which lead to their being respectively called by names, which it were better now to avoid. In popular language, Mr. Gladstone has long been classed with one of these parties; and on this ground the opposition to his election in 1847 exclusively rested. On the present occasion, the opposition has originated with the same class as before; and it is especially to be borne in mind, that, whatever form it may have since assumed, it emanated in the first instance, not *from* those who before supported him, and who, had he since changed his views, had a right (and they alone, consistently with ancient usage) to make a question of his re-election; but *from* those who opposed him in 1847, and who have no reason for doing so now, that they did not equally possess then. It is well known, that the present opposition originated with what is termed the Exeter Hall party, who were for several weeks secretly engaged in canvassing for votes, with a view to displace Mr. Gladstone, and to elect, instead, one of their own body. This attempt having failed, in consequence of many, even of those who objected to Mr. Gladstone, refusing to be represented by one not in strict communion with the Church of England, overtures were then made to those who objected to Mr. Gladstone on very different grounds, with whom the original promoters had nothing in common beyond the negative bond of a common objection. To these, what may be called (to use a familiar illustration) the good-will of the concern, was made over, together with many of the votes, and a combination formed accordingly. This change, however, in the opposing body, involved the necessity of seeking for a new ground for disturbing the representation of the University; and this was found in the change which it was alleged had taken place in Mr. Gladstone's ecclesiastical and political principles since 1847.

In aid of this new ground of objection, there came

Mr. Wordsworth's Letter to Mr. Gladstone (on the Pamphlet before spoken of)—a Letter of which it is only justice to say, that it is written in a tone worthy of its excellent and gifted author, but at the same time abounding in fallacies; the author having altogether lost sight of the main scope of the Pamphlet against which it is directed, and its chief remarks being for the most part beside the question at issue.

As regards Mr. Gladstone's Pamphlet, I have met with very few who have read it, among those who found their opposition on the deductions erroneously drawn from it. Nor of this would I judge harshly. In large bodies of men, it is not to be expected that all, or even the greater number, will find time to read for themselves. It arises out of the very nature of the case, that a large proportion take their opinion from others, on whose judgment they have good reason to place reliance; especially where it would be wrong even for a moment to suspect an intention to mislead; and where references are given for every position advanced, to which every one has full liberty to turn, if necessary, for his individual satisfaction. In the present instance, Mr. Wordsworth has overlooked the circumstances under which, and the purpose for which, Mr. Gladstone's Pamphlet was written; and without this key, it was the less unnatural that he should have taken the view of it which he has.

Mr. Gladstone, in his Letter to Mr. Greswell, emphatically denies that his views on the relations of the Church to the State have undergone any change since 1847; or that the abandonment of the Church's connexion with the State is involved in the legitimate development of the principles he now advocates. He maintains, that "the principles, of which he is now the advocate, are the very same that he avowed, and for the avowal of which he was not sparingly assailed, in 1847; that he is aware of no incompatibility between the principles of full religious freedom, and the maintenance of the National Church in connection with the State; to both of which he is now as ever cordially attached; . . . that whether the question be or be not an open one for others, it can, in his judgment, be no open question for one who

aspires to the representation of the University of Oxford;—that, in short, he disowns and repudiates both these allegations, emphatically and in all their parts."

This simple and emphatic declaration ought to be sufficient to satisfy any reasonable person. But since Mr. Wordsworth, and others, taking their cue from him, have drawn different conclusions from Mr. Gladstone's Pamphlet; and since there is, in that Pamphlet, what might appear at first sight at variance with the views Mr. Gladstone had so powerfully advocated, not five, but fourteen years ago, it may not be deemed altogether superfluous, to those who value consistency in public men, (though they may not deem it necessary, that the views of the matured practical Statesman should entirely accord with the ardent aspirations of the days of youth,) to trace briefly the coherence of these alleged opposite systems.

Mr. Gladstone, at the commencement of his public life, contended for the identity, in every well-regulated Christian community, of the Church with the State: and this he advocated with all the energy inspired by a commanding intellect, and a truly religious mind, deeply imbued with, and earnestly devoted to, Catholic truth.

It is important to observe, however, that in doing this, he did not take the low Erastian view of the connexion,—that the Church was a mere creature and appendage of the State—nor the faithless temporising view of men of the world, that the Church needed the protection of the Civil power for the due development and proper application of her powers. But he took at once the lofty and only true view, that it was alike the duty and the interest of the State to unite itself, if it could, with the Church. The point of vision from which he took his view of this all-important subject, was not from the side of the Church, but from that of the State; not that the Church should seek to be supported by the State, but that the State should seek to be sanctified by an union with the Church. And this, it may be observed, is the only true theory of the connexion; and is the fulfilment of the prophecy, so much

perverted, of "Kings and Queens being the nursing fathers and mothers of the Church." Persons have treated this prophecy as though it intimated that Kings and Queens were to be the nurses of the Church itself; the Church as a body being under the protection of the State, instead of her children as individuals. Whereas, if any one will attentively read the passage and those parallel to it, he will see that the drift is very different:—that Kings and Queens should be so sensible of the blessedness of having their children in communion with the Church, that they would bring them to her to educate; that they would themselves wait on the Church, and, using a familiar image, carry the Church's children in their arms as *servants*. So that the whole prophecy would represent the Church in the relation of mistress, and the State in the relation of attendant, waiting on the Church's children.

It may be further observed, that this question is antecedent to any revelation on the subject. It is taught by the light of nature. Heathen statesmen would have been the first to have acknowledged the duty of bringing up their subjects in moral and religious truth, as far as it was attainable; but would not thereby have assumed, that truth was a Lesbian rule to be moulded according to the interest or caprice of the State; but that, truth being one and eternal, the State would endeavour to make its children conform to it and wait upon it, as far as an imperfect state of society, devoid of the motives and sanctions which Revelation alone supplies, would allow. This conscience, analogous to that of the individual, Mr. Gladstone contended that the State ought to have. And doubtless this is the true theory of the connexion of Church and State. A necessary consequence, however, of the practical adoption of this theory, is the suppression, on the part of the State, of all heresy. Whenever the Church and State are completely identical, false doctrinal teaching is prohibited; but then this is done, not on the part of the Church, but on that of the State; the State being bound to take care of the moral and spiritual interests of her members; on the same principle, in fact, as that by which,

even at this day, the State prosecutes for blasphemous publications, or on any other subject on which there yet remains a *consensus* among the various branches of the community; and if the Church appears to be the prosecutor, it is only accidentally so, inasmuch as, under the supposed theory, the Church and State are identical. The Church, as *the Church*, does not resort to the arm of flesh for assistance.

This "conscience," however, which Mr. Gladstone speaks of in his earlier work, the English State has long since repudiated; first, in the Toleration Acts; next, in the admission of Dissenters to the Legislature. Whether she is right or wrong in doing so, is immaterial to the present point. But this being the case, is the practical Statesman, in Mr. Gladstone's position, to decline conducting the government of the country on those principles which the State *will* admit? Is he to be accused of inconsistency or renunciation of his original principles, because, finding them inapplicable in the present state of civil society, he is compelled to act on those principles which society *will* tolerate; or because he carries out, to what he conceives to be their legitimate result, the principles which, though in theory he objects to them, the State has long adopted in her domestic policy? For my own part, I can well understand how a man may, with perfect honesty, contend for that rigid identity of Church and State which would proscribe by law all false teaching; and yet, finding the State will not do this, contend that the privileges and forms which she professes, on principle, to bestow on Dissent, should be made to apply to all classes alike; that the principle, in fact, if admitted at all, should be fairly carried out. It is on this principle that I account for Mr. Gladstone's vote on the Jewish Bill. I can understand a man saying, "exclude *all* error from participating in civil power: but if you refuse to do so, and if you maintain that religious error is no disqualification, extend the principle to all alike; unless you can shew, that this is met by some other counteracting or *limiting* principle." I am aware that it is commonly alleged, that this

limiting principle is provided, in the present case, by the assumed Christianity of the Legislature, which, it is maintained, the admission of the Jew would go to repudiate. But it must be remembered, that a very high Churchman regards the Legislature as already unchristianized, by the admission of those who deny our Blessed Lord's Divinity and almost every essential article of the Christian faith; and that to make common Christianity with such men involves him in the sin of virtually betraying that faith. This, I conceive, is what Mr. Gladstone means by a "bastard and deceptive consistency," leading to "the mutilation, under the seal of civil authority, of the Christian religion itself."

Now a man who finds that he cannot exclude the Jews from the Legislature on the ground that it would unchristianize it, is led next to measure the question by considerations of political expediency or justice; and this I conceive Mr. Gladstone to have done. I do not agree with him in that vote—(I should have excluded them by my vote had I been possessed of one)—nor am I defending it. I am only endeavouring to shew, that it does not involve any repudiation of his former principles. Had he been a less high Churchman—had he taken less high views of the Christian faith, and of the duty of the State in relation to it—he would probably have voted against the Jew Bill, on the ground that it unchristianized the State; and have admitted, that the denial of every essential article of the Christian faith does *not* unchristianize it.

I have now to offer a few remarks on the subject of Mr. Gladstone's advocacy of religious liberty, which, it has been said, involves, as a consequence, the separation of Church and State. After the gratuitous insults heaped upon the Church by the late Government, I apprehend that there are very few among us who will not contend for the principle of religious liberty, so far at least as that the Church may not be again exposed to treatment which the Government would not have dared to offer to any class of Dissenters, (if to any body of men at all,) and to which no one had before imagined that the Church was liable.

But to understand aright Mr. Gladstone's late advocacy of religious liberty, we must transport ourselves to Scotland, where that letter was written, and to which country alone it applies.

It must be remembered, that the Scotch Episcopal Church, of which Mr. Gladstone is a member, though in communion with the Established Church here, yet *there* is a Dissenting Church, and that Mr. Gladstone himself, as regards the State religion, is a Dissenter, as every English Churchman necessarily must be in Scotland. Now this Church had recently narrowly escaped proscription, through the Ecclesiastical Titles' Assumption Bill. That Bill, as originally worded, would have rendered the assumption of their ancient titles by the Scotch Bishops illegal. It might not have been so intended by its framers; but such was its provision; and, moreover, a certain party within the Kirk actually petitioned Parliament, that this provision might be carried into effect; a petition backed by a portion of the English press. Although the offensive clause was afterwards so far modified as to fall short of declaring the Scotch Episcopal Titles positively illegal, yet it was done with a very bad grace, and pains were taken, somewhat offensively, in the subsequent wording, that nothing should be so construed as to give to those ancient titles the slightest claim to legality. It was shortly after these events that Mr. Gladstone wrote his Letter to the Bishop of Aberdeen, in which he proposes to strengthen the Church by an infusion of lay-communicants into her councils. Writing, then, as a Dissenter, to the head of a communion which had narrowly escaped proscription by law, it was not unnatural that he should contend for the principle of religious freedom in strong terms. I admit, that in doing this he has given expression to sentiments which sound somewhat strange to the ear of an English Churchman, as coming from one of his brethren. But though, in his *ecclesiastical* relation, he writes as a Churchman, it is as a Churchman under a recently threatened proscription; and, in his *political* relation, as a Dissenter. His words are, "What then we

(I mean the members of all independent religious bodies, *in which capacity only, and as one connected with Scotland, I now write*) have to desire, is, generally, to be let alone." His advocacy for this has, I think, carried him too far: it is a fault to which all advocates are liable; but great allowance is to be made for the circumstances under which the members of the Church in Scotland were then placed; and the seeming, and partly unavoidable, inconsistency in this, on the part of an English Churchman, arises out of the inconsistency of the British State in establishing two opposite and incompatible systems in different portions of the empire, by which the members of the established religion in one portion become Dissenters the instant they cross the border, and vice versâ.

I am not now censuring the system, which may be, for aught I know, unavoidable; but I refer to it, to account for that apparent inconsistency which has been so strongly and unjustly alleged against Mr. Gladstone. A case might be supposed, in which the most bigoted Presbyterian Establishmentarian, nay, even one of those who recently petitioned Parliament to proscribe Episcopacy in Scotland, might, on this side of the Tweed, under the apprehension of a like danger, become the most clamorous-~~stickler~~ for stick religious liberty: but he would deem it an unfair inference to be told, that this involved the wish to dis-establish his own communion over the border.

It would be beside the object of the present remarks, to advert at any length to Mr. Gladstone's past eminent services, especially on behalf of the Church in the Colonies, both in his public and private capacity. But they must not be lost sight of; neither ought we to forget his most noble and almost single-handed defence of the Bishop of Bath and Wells against the most unconstitutional and most dangerous proceeding which has been witnessed within the walls of Parliament for a long period; the attempt to supersede the ordinary Courts of Justice by a vote of the House of Commons; an attempt which no party would have dared to make, were not the Church or the University the subject of the attack.

Many years have now elapsed since the general consent of our Academic body pointed to Mr. Gladstone as their future Representative; and those who are now endeavouring to remove him from that post, are incurring no small degree of responsibility. With the clouds that are gathering around the Church and the University—with the University Commission, set on foot by her bitterest and implacable enemy, carried out in far too great subservience to his views, and now about to be backed by a spurious and misdirected public opinion—those will have much to answer for, who endeavour to deprive us of that claim on Mr. Gladstone's services which is involved in his being our Representative. Who is to take his place in the arduous contest which is approaching? It is no disparagement to my most estimable friend, the Warden of Merton, for whom I entertain the highest respect and esteem, to say that he is not the man. Nor do I consider that those are his true friends, whose zeal has led them to draw him from his dignified retirement, (for so it may be called in comparison,) where he is discharging the duties of his important office with honour to himself and benefit to others, surrounded by every domestic blessing, and are endeavouring to thrust him into the cares and turmoils of public life, at an age when most men contemplate retiring from it. Does he possess the Parliamentary connexion, the Parliamentary experience, which time alone can give, to enable him to cope with those relentless and untiring foes, with whom the Church and University have to contend; and, above all, does he possess the ear of the House of Commons, so essential to the practical usefulness of a Statesman? It is because Mr. Gladstone possesses these subsidiary qualifications in an eminent degree, (I am instituting no comparison between their personal ones,) which confer the power of carrying into effect what the interests of his constituents require, that he has claims that no competitor can possess. Nor can I imagine any course more suicidal than that pursued by those who are endeavouring, however unsuccessfully, to prevent his re-election.

I hope the day will never arrive, when the University will follow in the train of a mere Statesman, however distin-

guished: still more unwillingly would I see it the blind worshipper of mere talent and intellect, however great. But when talent of this kind, fostered and developed within our walls, has, during a public life of no inconsiderable duration, and in eventful times, been consecrated to the cause of Christ's Church Militant, it doubtless does acquire claims of the highest nature.

So completely does our present Representative seem formed, both by nature and by circumstances, for the place he now fills, that if in an evil hour the Constituency should be led to terminate the relation, I will not say that the loss would be ours alone, for of no man living will I admit, that he would not derive honour from that office;—still, to borrow the figure of the Roman historian, so remarkable would be his absence from the pedestal he has hitherto occupied in our Academic Temple, that he would henceforth be the more conspicuous from being no longer found there—præfulgebat eo ipso quod effigies ejus non visebatur[a].

[a] Tac. Ann. iii. c. 76.

Belbroughton, July 1, 1852.